

## DENTAL CARE

SUBMITTED BY JILL HOEHLEIN

I know that most of us are really aware that brushing our teeth is very important, not just from a health standpoint but also for a social reason – who likes “morning breathe?” The new American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) dental care guidelines for dogs and cats recently were redesigned to encourage veterinary clinics to provide more comprehensive dental care for our pets. This now includes everything from pre-anesthetic exams to dental X-rays, scaling/polishing and using fluoride sealants. And it also encourages the vets and their staff to educate the public on the importance of good dental health care.

About 80% of dogs show signs of periodontal disease by the time they are 3 years of age. Plaque can lead to a buildup of tartar in just three days. Each year when you go in for your dog’s annual exam, the vet should examine their teeth.

This home care includes frequent brushing of teeth – at least several times a week if you can’t manage it daily. Only use pet toothpaste. My own dogs love to “eat” the paste and line up for their teeth to be done – it’s like a treat to them. Start your dog young and slowly getting used to your fingers in their mouth and rubbing along their teeth. A finger brush is a good transition from your finger to a toothbrush. Remember the mouth does not have to be opened wide – the jaw can remain closed, just be sure to reach those back molars. The whole process should not take more than a minute. What if your dog will just not tolerate this – then you can feed dry food that contains an enzyme for the breakdown of tartar, give a dental chew, OxyFresh (a liquid for their drinking water), or some dental care biscuits – these can be purchased from your vet or at a pet store.

Remember that tooth decay and periodontal disease can affect the health of the heart, lung and kidney. ☺



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